Who is the David Gilbert?

David Gilbert was a founding member of Columbia University Students for a Democratic Society and a member of the Weather Underground Organization. After eleven years spent underground, he was arrested with members of the Black Liberation Army and other radicals following an armored car robbery in 1981. He is currently serving 75 years-to-life

David Gilbert grew up in a Jewish family in Brookline, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Inspired in his teens by the Greensboro sit-ins and other events of the American Civil Rights Movement, he joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) at age seventeen. He entered Columbia University in 1962. In his junior year he helped found the Independent Committee Against the War in Vietnam (ICV) and later the school's chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. He traveled regularly to Harlem while working as a tutor, and saw Malcolm X speak at Barnard College





in February 1965, experiences he describes as formative. Known by the late '60s primarily as a young theorist, publishing articles in New Left Notes and other movement publications, he went on to play an organizing role in the April-May 1968 Columbia student strike.

As Columbia SDS grew during the spring 1967 term, Gilbert tended to return to the Columbia campus only to offer a 'radical education' counter-course for Columbia SDS freshmen and sophomores in a lounge in Ferris Booth Hall. Most of his activism was centered in downtown at the New School for Social Research or at the New York SDS Regional Office.

In 1969 SDS split into different ideological factions, and Weatherman emerged, its purpose being to build up armed struggle amidst young white Americans in support of the Black Panthers and other militant groups, and also oppose the war in Vietnam with actions that would 'bring the War home.' Gilbert joined this group in 1969 with his friend Ted Gold, who in early 1970 would die in the infamous New York City townhouse explosion that killed three Weather members. The group's participants went into hiding at this point, and the organizations was renamed the Weather Underground.

Exactly what Gilbert did in the Weather Underground between 1970 and the group's demise around 1975 is not entirely clear. Although not on the group's coordinating committee (the Weather Bureau), he did act as a regional leader, spending at least some of these years in Colorado. The Weather Underground committed several bombings and actions in this period against government and business targets.

As support for the group began to wane on the Left, the pace of actions lessened, and some members reemerged. Most were not prosecuted or did not serve time in prison because of serious police misconduct and illegal tactis.

Gilbert did not emerge, however; he and his partner Kathy Boudin remained active even following the birth of their son Chesa Boudin in August 1980.

In the early 1980s some of the former members of the Weather Underground joined up with members with members of the Black Liberation Army. Together they formed a new organization called the Revolutionary Armed Task Force (RATF).

On October 21, 1981, the group participated in an expropriation of funds from a Brinks armored car at the Nanuet Mall, near Nyack, New York. During the incident, a shootout broke out resulting in the death of one guard, minutes later two police officers were also killed in a shootout at a roadblock. Also killed in a subsequent shootout days later was a BLA soldier by the name of Myatari Sundiata.



Katherine Boudin, Judith Clark, Samuel Brown and David Gilbert were captured as they fled from the scene. Several days later, Sekou Odinga was arrested and tortured after a high-speed chase and shootout with police. During the altercation, BLA soldier, Myatari Sundiata was killed.

Marilyn Buck, Kuwasi Balagoon and several others were also arrested in connection with the incident.

In the fall of 1983, David Gilbert was sentenced, along with Kuwasi Balagoon and Judith Clark, to 75 years-to-life for three counts of felony manslaughter. Their extremely long sentence for participating in this action may be due to their decision not to participate in their trial and not recognizing the authority of the state to try them.

Gilbert continued his activism despite being in prison. He co-founded an inmate peer education program on HIV and AIDS in the Auburn Correctional facility in 1987, and a similar more successful project in Great Meadows prison in Comstock following his transfer there. His work in HIV and AIDS education was prompted by the death of his comrade Kuwasi Balagoon to AIDS in 1986.

He has published book reviews and essays in a number of small/independent newspapers and journals, which were collected in to the anthology No Surrender: Writings from an Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner (Abraham Guillen Press) in 2004. He has also published longer single pieces on the topic of misleading AIDS conspiracy theories and white working class political consciousness. The 2003 documentary *The Weather Underground* featured interview segments with Gilbert, illuminating his profile beyond those in the small political prisoner support network who have been following his case.

Free David Gilbert

Write to the David Gilbert at:

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Local groups supporting David:
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David Gilbert



Former Member of the Weather Underground Sentenced to 75 Years-to-Life